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RABBI HERSCHEL SCHACHTER

Ma'asei Avos Siman LaBonim

Four very old minhagim are based on events described in Parshas Lech Lecha. When Avraham Avinu expressed his concern that he was already so old that probably will not have any children of his own, HKB"H (G-d) instructs him to go outside of his tent under the night star-filled sky. Can you possibly count all of the stars? So too will you have so many descendants that it will be impossible to count them all. For many generations it was the custom for a younger girl to get married outside, to invoke the Divine blessing of having many children. When a woman getting married was older, and the couple was not expecting to have any children, the wedding ceremony would be done indoors. Some trace this practice back to the days of the Talmud (see B'ikvei Hatzhon, p. 266)

When Avraham Avinu performed the mitzvah of bris milah, the Torah tells us that Hashem gave him the entire land of Eretz Yisroel. An individual person or even a family certainly doesn't need an entire land! Obviously Avraham would be the founding father of an entire nation, and the land will belong to that nation. Rav Yaakov Emden claims that our common custom of giving a gift to the baalei simcha upon the occasion of the celebration of a bris derives from this biblical narrative. We follow the lead of HKB"H who also gave this major gift (of all of Eretz Yisroel) upon the occasion of the very first bris.

In the sefer Matteh Moseh (by Rav Moshe Matt, student of Maharshal) it is recorded that the custom is to wait to name the baby until the bris. This is reminiscent of that fact that Avram was given a new name (Avraham) at the time of his bris. In truth, the case of Avraham is totally different from ours. Avraham's bris served the function of geirus (conversion). His neshama and personality were undergoing a major change. To use the Talmudic metaphor, "geir shenesgayer k'kattan she'nolad dami" (a non-Jew who converts is likened unto a newly born baby). In this case it made sense to give him a new name. The new name indicated that he would serve the role of "founding father" of the Jewish people. This really does not apply in the instance of a simple bris celebration. Nevertheless, the custom is to reminisce over the giving of the name "Avraham" at the occasion of his bris.

The Talmud records an ancient custom that when bathing, dressing, and putting on shoes, one always takes care of the right side of the body first, and only later the left side. The one exception is with respect to tying one's shoe laces, where we take care of the left side first. The reason for

this discrepancy is reminiscent of the tying of the tefillin on the arm, which is done on the left side of the body. (In the days of the Talmud, the shoe straps would be similar to the tefillin straps.) Why are the tefillin tied on the left arm instead of the right?

The kohanim in the beis hamikdash did the Avodah (sacrificial service) with their right hands. Avodah done with the left hand would be deemed possul (unacceptable), and would have to be done over. Rambam explains the theme of the possuk "b'chol dracheicha da-eiy-hu". We ought not divide our activities into two areas, Kodesh and chol: mitzvah vs. secular activities. We should dedicate all of our activities towards the service of Hashem. Even our eating and drinking, our working for a living, or marriage and the raising of our children should all be done in the service of Hashem. All secular activities should be performed as a "hechsher mitzvah", as a means to enable us to lead a life of mitzvos. When we bathe, when get dressed, etc. we treat all mundane activities as if we were Kohanim performing the avodah in the Temple. We prefer the right side first, just as avodas hakorbanos (sacrificial service) had to be done with the right hand.

Avraham Avinu had the moral and ethical conviction, together with the courage, to put together a tiny little army to wage war against terror. Neither he nor his immediate family was personally endangered by the terrorists, but yet he intuitively knew that this was the correct route to take. Firstly, because one should not sit idly by while other s are suffering from terror, and secondly because ultimately, this Hitler will control so much of the globe, that in the end he will terrorize him as well. Avraham's waging of the war was clearly an act of heroism, as well as his later refusal to accept any of the captured loot for himself. Both the waging of the war and the refusing of the wealth were fulfillments of "b'chol dracheicha da-eiy-hu". He really led all of his life in such a way as to reflect the tselem Elokim which he possessed. The Talmud records a tradition that as a reward for Avraham's refusal to accept "neither a string nor a shoe strap", his descendants were rewarded with the two mitzvos of the string of the tzitzis and the straps of the tefillin. When we tie our shoe straps every day we reminisce over the heroism of Avraham Avinu. We tie the left shoe first to recall that because of Avraham Avinu's Kiddush Hashem in connection with the shoe-straps, his descendants were rewarded with the mitzvah of tefillin. We too should convert the secular sectors of our lives into hechsher mitzvah, in fulfillment of "b'chol dracheicha da-eiy-hu". There will no longer be kodesh and chol, rather the "chol" will become "kodesh".

From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: November 06, 2003 Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech Lecha "RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech Lecha

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 390 Geirus - Mitzvah, Reshus, or Issur?

There's No Place Like Away From Home To Learn How To Be A Good Host

The very first Rashi in our parsha [Bereshis 12:1] interprets the words "Go for yourself" (Lech-Lecha) to mean "for your own benefit and welfare". The Imrei Shammai cites an incident involving Reb Nachum of Chernobyl (1730-1787) which elucidates this Rashi.

Reb Nachum was once imprisoned. It did not take much in the Ukraine for a Jew -- a Rabbi especially -- to wind up in jail. An old Jew came to visit Reb Nachum and told him that he could explain a particular reason why Reb Nachum was sitting in jail.

Reb Nachum used to devote much effort to the mitzvah of redeeming Jews from captivity (pidyon shevuyim). At a time when Jews were arbitrarily and capriciously thrown into jail, he felt obligated to do whatever he could to work for their release. The old Jew told him that G-d put Reb Nachum himself in jail so that he would be able to appreciate

what a great mitzvah he was doing when working for the release of Jewish prisoners. Now that he was sitting in jail, he would be better at empathizing with the prisoners who he helped. The next time he would go out to raise money for pidyon shevuyim, it would be a different experience. He would have more appreciation for the wonderful mitzvah that he was doing.

Here too, Avraham was destined to be the prototype of kindness toward his fellow man. He was destined to be the prototype of welcoming in wayfarers. G-d wanted to show him what a great mitzvah it is to be a host to guests who need a place to stay. The best way to learn how to be a host is to first be a traveler.

Anyone who needs to go away for a Shabbos experiences what it is like to be away from his family, away from his own bed, and away from his surroundings. Especially when a person is a wandering traveler for an extended period of time -- he really learns to appreciate the great kindness provided by those who warmly extend hospitality. This experience is the best training course for becoming a better host.

Therefore, Avraham was directed "Lech Lecha". Be a traveler. It will be for your own benefit and welfare because knowing what it means to be a traveler will help you so much more when you want to become a host.

I know someone who is an excellent teacher. He had been an excellent student all his life and had always found learning easy. He was always stimulated by his classes and enjoyed learning. When he went to college, Physical Education was a required course. Physical Education for this person was like calculus for people who aren't good in mathematics. It was a disaster. He got a C in the course -- the lowest grade of his entire college career.

But he confided to me that this experience taught him how to be a better teacher. Had he coasted through his entire educational career without experiencing difficulty and frustration in a class, he would not have known the meaning of a student struggling and having difficulties with his studies. P.E. gave him the experience of being behind his classmates and feeling frustrated that it was so much easier for them and that they were so much better than he. That made him into a better teacher.

G-d was doing the same thing for Avraham. Go out -- for your own benefit. You will see how hard it is to be a traveler and you will be a much better host as a result.

#### Hesitant About Circumcision for the Best of Reasons

Avraham was 99 years old when he was instructed to circumcise himself. Many commentaries are bothered by the fact that Avraham waited until this point in his life before performing the Bris Milah. Our Sages teach that Avraham fulfilled the entire Torah (even Rabbinic enactments), even though he was not commanded to do so. If he fulfilled the entire Torah, why had he not yet performed this basic mitzvah of circumcision? Why did he wait for the specific command from G-d to do the Milah. A variety of answers are given to this question.

There is a related question that ties in with next week's parsha, which begins with G-d appearing to Avraham by the plains of Mamre. What was Avraham doing there? Our Sages teach us that Avraham had gone to seek counsel from Mamre regarding G-d's command that he should circumcise himself.

This is very strange. G-d gave Avraham a command to circumcise himself. What is there to discuss with Mamre? He did not consult with anyone when he was commanded to sacrifice his son. Regarding no other command do we find that Avraham sought counsel from his neighbors. Why was Milah different? This reinforces the evidence that for some reason Avraham was hesitant about going ahead with the circumcision. Why?

The Medrash seems to say that Avraham was hesitant about fulfilling the command of circumcision for the best of reasons.

Avraham was in the 'Kiruv [outreach] business'. He brought people under the wings of the Divine Presence. He felt -- and rightly so -- that to

influence people spiritually, one has to be able to relate to them. People have to look at a person who is trying to influence them spiritually and think "I can relate to this person. He is a person like me. He is not crazy. He is not weird. I can become like that person."

As long as Avraham was uncircumcised he was like everybody else. Once he made that indelible mark on his body, however, he would be forever different. If he was going to be forever different, he knew that he would inevitably lose a certain amount of his ability to affect other people. He would no longer be the same as them. He would be looked at as strange and different. His whole mission in life would be adversely affected by the command of circumcision.

This is the meaning of the Medrash that Avraham went to Mamre. He did not inquire from Mamre whether he should or should not fulfill G-d's command. He just wanted to check Mamre's reaction to gauge whether he should do the Milah publicly or privately. Should he fulfill this Mitzvah in an open and public fashion or would he be better off doing it clandestinely?

#### Why Jeopardize Avraham's Career As A Kiruv Worker?

This explains Avraham's hesitancy to perform the circumcision. Avraham was concerned that it would jeopardize his efficacy in converting heathens. The question then becomes, given this correct concern by Avraham, what all of a sudden changed at age 99? Why did G-d suddenly demand circumcision at this point in Avraham's life? Avraham still had a long life ahead of him. Why did G-d jeopardize Avraham's career in 'kiruv' by requiring milah at this point in his life? Why didn't He wait until Avraham was 150, so that he would have another 51 years of being a better outreach worker? Avraham did not die until he was 175. Let him have milah at 170. Why 99? Why all of a sudden now?

Rav Nissan Alpert suggests that what happened at age 99 was that Avraham was now going to have a son who was supposed to become the future Jewish nation. As such, Avraham now has an even more important job than being an outreach worker for the nations. His job now became being the best educator possible for the future Jewish nation. He must become the most effective teacher possible not for the whole world, but for his own son.

As parents, we must try to be as perfect Jews and as perfect human beings as we can. We are the ultimate role models for our children. Therefore, we need to get our act together as parents. Even if until we became parents we fooled around or have not been serious about life, parenthood brings new responsibilities. This is true for every parent. It was certainly true for Avraham Avinu, who was the father of Yitzchak and the father of the future Jewish nation.

Avraham now had to become as perfect as possible. Since Milah was a step toward that paradigm of perfection, there was no putting it off any longer. Even if the outreach would suffer somewhat, he now had a more important job.

#### If I Were Rothschild, I Would Be Richer Than Rothschild

There was once a Mohel who was given the opportunity to be the Mohel of one of the grandchildren of the Brisker Rav [R. Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, 1886-1959]. After the Mohel performed the circumcision, he went to the Brisker Rav and expressed satisfaction at how thrilled he was that he had the merit to circumcise the grandson of such a great person.

The Brisker Rav told him he was making a silly mistake. The Brisker Rav pointed out that when fulfilling the commandment of circumcision, upon which 13 Covenants were made with G-d, it is such a great mitzvah that it does not make the slightest difference whether the baby being circumcised is the grandson of the Brisker Rav or the son of a simple Jew. The simple act of Milah is so great that it just cannot become any better than that.

The Brisker Rav gave the Mohel an example. There was once a poor man who earned his living by teaching small children (a melamed). In those days, teachers of small children were terribly poor. This melamed said, "If I were to suddenly receive all of Rothschild's money, I would be richer than Rothschild. Why is that, you may ask? Because I would have all of Rothschild's money and I would still do a little teaching on the side. I would be wealthier than Rothschild!"

The Brisker Rav told the Mohel that taking pride in circumcising his grandson is just as foolish. The wealth of the merit of doing any circumcision equates to the wealth of Rothschild. The added merit of circumcising my grandchildren is like the incremental few rubles of a melamed's salary. It is like adding \$7.95 to a billion dollars!

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: November 06, 2003 To: Peninim Parsha

PENINIM ON THE TORAH  
BY RABBI A. LIEB SCHEINBAUM  
Go for yourself from your land. (12:1)

Chazal note that "Lech Lecha" is repeated a second time, when Hashem once again instructs Avraham Avinu to go forth. This time he is to go to Har Moriah to offer his son, Yitzchak, as a sacrifice. They add that the second Lech Lecha was more beloved to Hashem. What are Chazal teaching us? Is there a question about the relative significance of Akeidas Yitzchak compared to Avraham's moving from his home to go out into the world?

In his sefer, Simchas HaTorah, Horav Simcha Hakohen Sheps, zl, distinguishes between the two commands, offering a practical insight into Chazal's query and response. Both commands to Avraham had a definite purpose: to sanctify Hashem's Name in the world. The difference between the two concerns the immediate focus of the Kiddush Hashem. When Avraham was told to leave his home, his family, his past, and go forth to build the future of Monotheism in the world, the goal was Kiddush Shem Shomayim b'rabim, public sanctification of Hashem's Name throughout the world. Akeidas Yitzchak also centered on Kiddush Hashem, but it was intended for a different audience. It was for Yitzchak alone. The next link in the chain of transmission of belief in the Ribbono Shel Olam had to concretize his own beliefs.

Chazal wonder which trial is more beloved to Hashem: sanctifying His Name to the world, chinuch, teaching and transmitting emunah, faith, in the Almighty to his son. They respond that chinuch - transmitting the message of Hashem's Oneness to one's own flesh and blood - eternalizes it, guaranting its continued application. Avraham Avinu converted many people, reaching out to the world. How many remained committed to his teachings? How many followed in his pathway? Very few, if any, continued on the road charted by the first Patriarch. His son, however, not only adhered to his father's teachings, he became the next Patriarch, assuring that the Kiddush Shem Shomayim that he experienced was disseminated to the next generation.

Teaching a world is all-important. For some, it is their lifelong ideal. One should not focus on, however, at the expense of his own children. Many educators have successfully transmitted the message of Judaism to the wider community, but regrettably have neglected to reach their very own. There are also individuals who refuse to go out and teach the world for fear that they will harm their own children. This selfish excuse has kept some of the most talented potential teachers from spreading Hashem's Torah to the greater community. There is no doubt, chinuch of one's own children takes precedence, but how should he weigh the relative importance of the two goals? Educating one's own children does not take the place of chinuch ho'rabim.

Avram passed into the land as far as the site of Shechem. (12:6)

Rashi explains that Avraham Avinu went to Shechem by design. He prayed there for Yaakov's sons, Shimon and Levi, who would wage war there. Interestingly, it was necessary for Avraham to go into Shechem to pray for them. Could he not have prayed elsewhere for his descendants? Horav Shmuel Walkin, zl, derives from this that in order to pray appropriately for another person's anguish, it is critical that the individual himself experience the pain. Prayer is the result of sensitivity. This idea is manifest in a number of places.

Rachel Imeinu was buried on the road near Bais Lechem, not in Chevron, which would be her rightful burial place, so that she would be able to help her descendants when Nevuzaradan exiled them. They would pass by her tomb, and Rachel would go out onto her grave, weeping and seeking mercy for them. Why did Rachel have to "go out" of her grave to weep? Certainly, she was aware of her children's travail. She could have wept from within her grave. Once again, we see that in order to empathize, one must observe, one must sensitize himself to the pain.

Likewise, we see that when Moshe Rabbeinu went out to his brethren, the Torah writes, "Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens" (Shemos 2:11) Rashi comments that Moshe went out to see their suffering and grieve with them. It would have been so natural, so practical, even so understandable for Moshe to remain secure and protected within the confines of the palace. He could have chosen not to notice his brothers' travail, to claim no kinship with the Jewish slaves. Moshe's growing "up" was really his act of going "out." Growing up is growing out, going out of ourselves and identifying with the needs of others, reaching out beneficently to others. Regrettably, many of us become self-absorbed as we grow older, failing to recognize that as one matures, he should begin to shoulder greater responsibility from without.

Avraham Avinu knew that Shechem was to be a place prepared for punishment; the evil permeated the air. It suffused the environment. By going there, by being within the confines of the area, he could identify with and sensitize himself to the future needs of his descendants. This is the essence of empathy.

A poor man once approached Horav Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa, and asked him for a donation. Rav Bunim immediately gave him a considerable amount of money. As the poor man began to leave, Rav Bunim called him back and gave him some more money. Overcome with curiosity, the man asked Rav Bunim why he had called him back.

"The first donation was in response to the pity I felt for you," said Rav Bunim. "The second one was to fulfill Hashem's command to give to the poor."

One has to give tzedakah to fulfill the mitzvah. One must also understand and empathize with the needy. In fact, it is especially important that one give to suit the needs of the recipient, not simply as a response to his own feelings of guilt.

Giving does not always have to be of a material nature. There was once a famine in Russia. People literally starved to death. One day a poor, emaciated beggar came up to a man and begged for alms. The man searched his pockets for a coin, to no avail. He did not have even one copper coin in his possession. Taking the beggar's worn hands between his own, he said, "Do not be angry with me, my brother, I have nothing with me." The thin, lined face of the beggar lit up as from some inner light, and he whispered in reply, "But you called me 'brother!' That was a gift in itself."

People are starving all around us - not for bread, but for recognition. I would suggest that much of the depression that we see could have been prevented had the individual been exposed to kindness. While we readily give a check to the poor, how many of us have the time, thoughtfulness, or compassion to say a kind word, perform a gracious act, or actually give a piece of bread to an emaciated spirit?

Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl, imbued in his students a sense of responsibility for their fellow Jew. No subject so dominated his teachings as the obligation imposed upon every Jew towards his brother. Among the most important words in his lexicon were Klal Yisrael. His constant question was: "What are you doing for Klal Yisrael?"

Rav Shraga Feivel would interpret the pasuk in Tehillim (145:4), L'dor va'dor yeshabach maasecha, "One generation will praise Your creations to another," to mean that each generation has an obligation to improve Hashem's world, rendering it more praiseworthy. He emphasized that a Jew may not make himself the primary focus of his own life. To concern oneself only with himself - apart from the community - is wrong.

In Pirkei Avos 2:18, Chazal say, "Do not judge yourself to be a wicked person." Rav Shraga Feivel interpreted this to mean that anyone who limits his efforts to himself alone - who is bifnei atzmecha, for himself - is derelict in his obligation. Torah is called Toras chesed, the Torah of kindness. This is Torah that is taught to others, not just kept selfishly to oneself.

The Sefas Emes teaches us that a Jew must be prepared to sacrifice everything, even his personal share in the World to Come, on behalf of Klal Yisrael.

Rav Shraga Feivel sensitized his students to the needs of other students. Younger students in the Mesivta learned to be sensitive to the needs of those sitting next to

them in the bais hamedrash. Better students were "encouraged" to study with weaker students.

He once noticed two talmidim carrying chairs to a classroom. He asked one of them, "For whom are you bringing this chair?" The student answered, "For myself." He then asked the same question of the other boy, and the response was the same. Rav Shraga Feivel chided, "You brought a chair for yourself, and you brought a chair for yourself. So you are both shleppers. Had each one of you brought a chair for the other, each of you would have performed a chesed."

Mesivta Torah Vodaath students were never allowed to forget that, regardless of how happy they personally were to be able to sit and study Torah in the bais hamedrash, they represented a small fraction of the Jewish world - a world that regrettably was far-removed from the walls of the bais hamedrash. This situation has lamentably not changed significantly. While the number of students in the bais hamedrash has certainly increased, the Jewish world outside the bais hamedrash has also grown. As bnei Torah, we have a moral obligation not to ignore that world. Indeed, what greater act of chesed, kindness, is there than bringing a Jew back into the spiritual fold?

And I will uphold My covenant...to be a G-d to you and to your offspring after you. (17:7)

"To be a G-d to you and to your offspring after you." Why could the Torah not simply have said, "To be a G-d to you and to your offspring?" It seems that the two do not necessarily go together. Rather, Hashem must first be a G-d to the father, and then afterwards, He can be a G-d to the son. That is the natural order. A child observes a role model in his father. He senses his father's level of commitment, and he becomes inspired. Regardless of whether it is a parent or a gifted rebbe, a child/student needs a positive role model, someone that inspires him, infusing him with a desire to grow in Torah. We never know when that inspiration will occur or who will be the source, but invariably it is an important part of the child's growth process.

The Ben Ish Chai, Horav Yosef Chaim, zl, m'Baghdad, was a brilliant Torah giant, who inspired thousands with his writings and lectures. Each Shabbos, he would lecture in the main shul in Baghdad to thousands of Jews for two hours. The pearls of wisdom that left his mouth were treasured by his listeners. Among those who came to listen was a young boy, Sulamon Mutzafi. His father, Rav Tzion Meir, was one of Baghdad's known Torah scholars. Every Shabbos, the young boy came with his father to hear Rav Yosef Chaim.

After the drashah, lecture, the child held onto his father's cloak as the assemblage went over to the rav to receive his blessing. It was finally Sulamon's turn to greet the rav. Shaking with awe and trepidation, holding onto his fathers' sleeve, the child went forward and kissed Rav Yosef Chaim's hand. This was the high point of the week. "It should be the will of Hashem that you grow up to become great in Torah," said Rav Yosef Chaim, as he placed his hands on young Sulamon's head. Everyone responded with a resounding Amen! This was no mere brachah, blessing - this was inspiration at its apex. Sulamon was already on the path to gadlus b'Torah, distinction in the field of Torah erudition.

On the thirteenth day of Elul, 1898, Rav Yosef Chaim's pure soul returned to its Maker. The funeral cortege left from the shul on Motzoei Shabbos, followed by thousands of broken-hearted Jews. Their beloved rebbe, their leader, mentor and guide, was gone. The eulogies were powerful portrayals of his life of dedication to Torah. Unparalleled mourning and grief were manifest. The Mutzafi family also attended, everyone but young Sulamon. He was too young.

Sulamon Mutzafi could not remain in his home. He had to attend the funeral of the rebbe that had left such a powerful impact on him. He had to say good-bye. He joined the assemblage of grief-stricken mourners. Like a young orphan, his cries shattered the sounds of silence, as he stood there watching Rav Yosef Chaim's mortal remains being lowered into the earth. At that very moment, he accepted upon himself greater sanctity, greater sublimity and purity. Torah would be his guide, his friend with whom he would share every minute of the day. He began to study every night from midnight until dawn. His parents attempted to dissuade him, claiming that such practice was set aside for great tzaddikim. Yet, the child was not swayed. He was not deterred from his mission. He was inspired to achieve greatness.

Our children have many such opportunities for inspiration. If they do not find it at home, they find it in the yeshivah, or in stories of Gedolim - who achieved distinction because they followed their own inspiration. When you bring up the subject of achieving greatness to a parent, the immediate response is, "Today is different." Heintiga tzeiten, today's times/society has greater demands. It is more difficult to get inspired. I recently read a story which was related by the Voideslaver Rav, zl.

When the Voideslaver was a young boy, he met an elderly rebbetzin who was a granddaughter of the Chasam Sofer, zl. She explained that as a young girl she would often eat the Shabbos meal with her grandfather. She remembered that once the Chasam Sofer spoke at the meal. He asserted that in each generation the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, takes on a new identity. This is done for a practical reason, since in each ensuing generation, people become increasingly aware of the dangers of associating with known evil, so they stay away. As they become aware of one evil disguise, the yetzer hora quickly dons a new one, so that his evil is always one step ahead. He then added that in their generation, the disguise/yetzer hora's new name could very well be heintiga tzeiten, today's world.

The Voideslaver continued his story, saying that he asked the rebbetzin what she felt was the yetzer hora of their day. At first, she demurred, claiming that she was nothing more than an elderly woman. Then after some cajoling, she said, "It may very well be l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven."

In other words, deception is all around us. We find excuses for our children's lack of inspiration, rejection of discipline, and absence of respect. In truth, however, it is all part of the yetzer hora's deceptive powers. This is similar to those times when we are prepared to resort to anything, even character assassination, all in the name of l'shem Shomayim.

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From: RABBI RISKIN'S Shabbat Shalom List [parsha@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: November 05, 2003 To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column  
Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Lekh Lekha (Genesis 12:1-17:27) By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel - Why was Abraham the first Jew? What was special and unique to Abraham that we do not find in the generations which preceded him?

Adam and Eve were the first two human beings - indeed, they created the first family - but it was a dysfunctional family at best: husband and wife not only sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, but they also added salt to the wounds when, confronted by G-d, instead of attempting to protect each other, they blame each other; what is even worse, their first-born Cain murders his younger brother Abel, uttering the most damning dismissal of responsibility in human history, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Clearly G-d's first family can hardly be upheld as models worthy of emulation.

Perhaps this is why a study of the genealogical tables listed in the portion of Genesis are remarkably lacking in any form of familial unit. The first genealogical list are the descendants of Cain: "And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Hanokh; and Cain was building a city and he ceded the name of the City - like the name of his son - Hanokh. And there was born of Hanokh, Irad, and Irad bore Mehuya'el, and Mehiya'el bore Metusha'el, and Metusha'el bore Lemekh" (Genesis 4:17,18). We have here seven generations - and not one woman's name is mentioned! Indeed, a nameless wife is mentioned only once, in the case of Cain; otherwise, it would seem that the men had the children by themselves! Moreover, Cain's son Hanokh is given a name which is related to education - a term which connotes an intellectual and emotional relationship between parent-teacher and son-student - but it is used instead as the name of a city which the father Cain apparently gifted to his son; the generations apparently bequeathed objects and real estate rather than ideals and emotions. Hanokh's son is even named Irad, an eternal city!

Lemekh does have two named wives- Adah and Zilah - but they are named only in order for the text to inform us (albeit in a round-about manner) that they have broken off relations with their husband. Indeed, the Midrash notes that the wives were purely functional in nature, the first for the purpose of child-bearing and the second for the purpose of sexual pleasure (Genesis 4:19-24, Midrash Rabbah and Rashi 4:19).

Lemekh can hardly provide us with a model for proper marital relationships.

The genealogy of Shet is even worse from a familial perspective, with the nine generations listed until Noah without any reference to a female whatsoever; the men seem to have "begat" (or bore) their sons through what seems to be a purely masculine enterprise (Genesis 4:26-5:31).

The degeneration of society is then Biblically expressed as a situation in which the sons of the powerful leaders (Elohim, El meaning mighty) grabbed any woman they desired, a shocking picture of the rule of might over right especially in terms of taking advantage of the "weaker sex" (Genesis 6:1-4). This is hardly a fitting atmosphere for developing the ethics of a loving and respectful family life! And even Noah, too - the individual whom G-d favors and who brings G-d comfort because he is righteous - is Biblically mentioned as having had three sons born to him, but it is only thanks to the midrash that we identify his wife as Naamah, the sister of Tuval-Cain (Genesis 5:32, 4:22, Rashi ad loc). Apparently, G-d is not happy with this state of affairs. When the Almighty commands Noah to erect an ark, He instructs him "to take seven pairs from every pure animal, a male and his mate (ish v'ishto, literally a man and his wife, Genesis 7:2); it is as though G-d is pointing out that just as the animals come in couples, so ought human beings establish their lives as husbands and wives together! And so when the Almighty commands Noah to leave the ark, He directs: "Go out from the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your son's wives with you" (Genesis 8:16). Unfortunately, Noah doesn't seem to take the hint: "And there went out Noah and his sons, and his wife and the wives of this sons with him." (Genesis 8:18).

Noah gets drunk, tells the Biblical text, and he exposes himself in the midst of his tent. "And Ham the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father" (Genesis 9:22). The Talmudic Sages explain that either Ham castrated his father or sodomized his father (B.T. Sanhedrin 70a). Clearly a society which does not provide definitive male and female parental models will pay a heavy price in terms of the sexual practices - or abnormalities - of its children. And it is no wonder that the genealogical listing of the descendants of Noah are likewise without the women: Ham bears (begats) Kush, and Kush bears (begats) Nimrod. Nimrod initiates the Kingdom of Babylon (Bavel), the land from which Nineveh (Assyria) emanated (Genesis 10:6-12). Nimrod parallels Hanokh's just as Nimrod is the third generation from Ham, so is Hanokh the third generation from Adam (Adam, Cain Hanokh) - and each build cities, things, rather than relationships and families. Indeed, just as Hanokh eventually led to the flood, so does Nimrod eventually lead to the tower of Babel. A humanity devoid of positive and value-inducing familial relationships is doomed to destruction!

After the tower of Babel - and the separation of people into different nation states and languages - Abraham enters the world scene. And right from the beginning, the Bible tells us, "And Abram and Nahor took for themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife is Sarai and the name of Nahor's wife is Milkah.." (Genesis 11:29). We learn that Sarai is barren, and that Abram and Sarai adopt Abram's orphaned nephew Lot and that they work together in teaching the Gentiles about the G-d of ethical monotheism (Genesis 12:5, Rashi ad loc). Perhaps the clearest expression of the uniqueness of Abraham's mission is found in G-d's charge: "And Abraham will become a great and mighty nation, through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. I have known (and loved) him in order that he will command his children and his household after him to observe the path of the Lord and to do righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:18,19). In sum, Abraham, unlike the earlier twenty generations - was a husband and pater-familias, an individual dedicated to his wife together with whom he set out to establish family continuity and world influence. The first Jew must - first and foremost - have the capacity to establish the first committed family! Only from such a family can there emerge a nation which will ultimately perfect the world.

Shabbat Shalom.

A Personal Post-Script After performing a wedding a number of years ago, a matriarch whom I greatly respected and loved - Mrs. Rita Kaufman (of blessed memory) - came up to me with a reproving and disappointed look in her eyes. "What a sad huppah!", she said. "The bride and groom were both orphans." I looked at her in disbelief, because Mrs. Kaufman knew both families, and the two mothers had stood alive and well under the nuptial canopy. "But I heard you read the Ketubah, Rabbi and the mothers weren't even mentioned!," she said. I often think of her words - and now include the mother's names in the Ketubah, when naming babies and calling bnei mitzvah to the Torah, and on tombstones. Only with Abraham do the names of the wives begin to appear in the Bible.

You can find Rabbi Riskin's parshiot on the web at: <http://www.ohrtorahstone.org.il/parsha/index.htm>  
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From: Benjamin G. Kelsen, Esq. [bgkelsen@optonline.net] Sent: Thursday, November 06, 2003 11:56 AM  
HaGaon HaRav Shlomo Elimelech Drillman, zt"l  
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchonon  
Editor's note: The following is based upon HaRav Drillman's weekly shiur in Parshas HaShavuah that was given on 11 Mar Cheshvan 5757, October 24, 1996. BGK

Parshas Lech Lecha

I. What was the nature of the nisayon of the shlichus to Eretz Yisroel with which Avraham Avinu was tested by HKB"H? The Torah tells us in 11:31 as follows:

Verse 31: Terach took his son, Avram, and Lot, the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai, his daughter-in-law, the wife of his son, Avram. With them he departed from Ur Kasdim, to go to the land of Canaan. [When] they came to Charan [however], they settled there.

We see from here that Terach was on his way to Eretz Canaan himself, that Terach himself felt something drawing him to Eretz HaKedoshah. If this is so then how is HKB"H's directing Avraham to finish the journey considered to be a challenge? Would Avraham not then be merely fulfilling his father's plans?

The Medresh tells us Terach left Ur Kasdim for Eretz Canaan because of a problem involving Nimrod, the king of Ur Kasdim. On his way towards Canaan, Terach and his family stopped in Charan. When Terach saw the wealth and prosperity of Charan he decided to stay there. Therefore when HKB"H tells Avraham to continue onward to Eretz Canaan He is telling Avraham to both leave his father and also to leave the comfort of Charan for the unknowns of Canaan. This was the challenge of Hashem's command to Avraham.

But why did Terach wish to travel to Eretz Canaan, why was this his intended destination? Rashi suggests that if any person wants to move to Eretz Yisroel, mimeilah, this must be because of the inherent kedushah of Eretz Yisroel.

One of the talmidim asked the rebbe if the kedushah of Eretz Yisroel was known and accepted by the nations of the world at the time of Avraham as it is today which is seen by the fact that everyone wants to claim the land for themselves. HaRav Drillman answered in the affirmative, that Rashi himself in explaining "v'haCanaani az ba'aretz" shows us that the nations of the world did in fact recognize the inherent holiness of the land.

Through his commanding Avraham to go to Eretz Yisroel HKB"H was teaching us that there can be no hope of success for Klal Yisroel's continued survival outside of Eretz Yisroel.

Historically, there was no time previously that was greater for Klal Yisroel than the golden age of Spain. And yet, still, one man, one rasha was able to take away all of the good and all of the peace of that age and create an evil and a darkness the likes of which had not been seen before. So terrible was this darkness that even the Arbarbanel himself, the Prime Minister of Spain, was forced to flee for his life. The same thing happened not more than 60 years ago in Europe. HKB"H has shown us throughout history that such is always the case when Klal Yisroel forgets the importance of Eretz Yisroel and becomes too settled in galus.

A further example is seen in the following anecdote: In 1949 Yeshiva University bestowed an honorary doctorate upon Bernard Baruch. Amidst much fanfare, Mr. Baruch addressed the Yeshiva University community including The Rav, zt"l. HaRav Drillman, appointed to the faculty of the Yeshiva at this point, remembers people saying that there was no more important a person in the Jewish world at the time than Mr. Baruch. When news of the honorary degree was related to Winston Churchill he commented that if the Jewish people wanted their new born state to survive they would need the help of Bernard Baruch. However, if there were ever to be a campaign against the Jews in the United States such as occurred in Nazi Germany then Bernard Baruch would be the first Jew sent to the gas chamber.

For this reason the passuk tells us that only if Avraham goes to Eretz Yisroel will he have sons, only in Eretz Yisroel will there be a future for Klal Yisroel and the geulah sheleimah.

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] To: yehsichot@etzion.org.il Subject: SICHOT64 -03: Parashat Lekh Lekha SICHU OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

The Selection of Avraham Summarized by Matan Glidai Translated by Kaeren Fish

"And G-d said to Avram, Get you out of your land and your birthplace..." (12:1). A question immediately arises as to the connection between this verse and the one that concluded last week's parasha: "And Terach took Avram... and Lot... and they departed with them from Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan, and they came as far as Charan and they dwelled there" (11:31). Why does G-d suddenly command Avraham to go to the land of Canaan if Avraham was planning to go there anyway? And if we say that Terach's family had decided to remain permanently in Charan, then what is the significance of the Torah's narration of the original intention of their journey? This question stands at the center of a debate between the Ibn Ezra and the Ramban. The Ibn Ezra, at the beginning of the parasha, writes that the command to "Get you out" was given to Avraham while he was still in Ur Kasdim. Although he was told to leave also his "father's house," G-d allowed Terach to join him on the journey, since He knew that Terach would continue no further than Charan.

The Ramban (12:1) rejects this explanation for several reasons. The verse, "I am G-d Who took you out of Ur Kasdim" (15:7), would seem to substantiate Ibn Ezra's view, but the Ramban explains (11:28) that "who took you out" refers to the miracle that G-d performed in bringing Avraham out alive from the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim. This, in turn, is problematic in light of a verse in Sefer Nechemia (9:7): "You are G-d the G-d who chose Avram and BROUGHT HIM OUT OF UR KASDIM and made his name Avraham" – which would seem to suggest that bringing Avraham out of Ur Kasdim was an important and critical stage in his selection.

The command "Get you out" presents a difficulty also from another direction. For twenty generations the Holy One had spoken with no

one but Noach. Noach was a righteous man who found favor in G-d's eyes, and so G-d spoke to him. All the rest of humanity, it seems, was not sufficiently righteous for them to merit G-d speaking to them. Who, then, is this Avraham? In what way did he merit G-d's revelation to him? Why are we told nothing about his character, his history, or his actions?

This question becomes even more disturbing if we look at the content of G-d's command. The Holy One promises Avraham that He will make him into a great nation, that He will bless him and make his name great, but He demands no action on Avraham's part (other than that he depart for Eretz Canaan)! Are there no commandments that he will be required to observe? Is he receiving such great reward "for free"?

The Maharal answers these questions in his book Netzach Yisrael (chapter 11). He explains that it was at this point that Am Yisrael was chosen from among all other nations: G-d selected Avraham and his descendants after him. Had we learned that the Holy One selected Avraham because of his righteousness, then we would conclude that the selection of Am Yisrael was based on Avraham's actions. Had the Holy One made His reward to Avraham conditional on the mitzvot that he would have to observe, we would conclude that our connection with G-d is conditional upon our observance of the mitzvot. The Torah wants to show that this is not the case: the selection of Am Yisrael is not dependent on their actions. Even if there would be a generation of Am Yisrael that did not observe mitzvot at all, their chosen status would not cease. If Am Yisrael wished to cease observing mitzvot and to cut themselves off from G-d, they would not be able to. G-d has chosen them and they are forever bonded to Him. The selection of Am Yisrael is of eternal validity and is not dependent on anything.

Let us return to the question with which we began: Didn't Avraham and his family plan to go to Eretz Canaan even before the command? It was G-d's hand that caused them to wish to go to Eretz Canaan, but they had no idea that it was G-d who was leading them in that direction. G-d had chosen Avraham and his descendants after him, and He wanted them to get to Eretz Yisrael and live there, and so He directed events in that direction.

Eretz Yisrael is an important and central element in the selection of Am Yisrael. The verse in Nechemia quoted above continues as follows: "You are G-d the G-d Who chose Avram and brought him out of Ur Kasdim... and you forged a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite..." We find here two important principles with regard to the selection of Avraham and Am Yisrael: i. The Holy One took Avraham out of Ur Kasdim without Avraham knowing that it was G-d Who was leading him. ii. The Holy One made a covenant with him regarding Eretz Yisrael. In fact, the whole Torah comes to teach us how Am Yisrael settled in Eretz Yisrael and then returned to it following a prolonged exile. Rashi, at the beginning of parashat Vayeshev, writes: "After describing the settlements of Esav and his descendants briefly, [the Torah] describes the settlements of Yaakov and his descendants at length and all their manifold exploits, for these are important to G-d and so He expands on them."

Thus there are three important fundamentals in the selection of Am Yisrael: a) The selection is not dependent on Am Yisrael's actions. b) Eretz Yisrael is an inseparable part of the selection. c) The hand of G-d guides Am Yisrael without their knowledge.

We may see throughout history how G-d has guided Am Yisrael towards Eretz Yisrael. The story of Lot teaches us that the settlement in Eretz Yisrael will be beset with problems – so it was from the beginning, and so the situation has continued through the ages. But ultimately things will sort themselves out for Am Yisrael, as they did in the past.

(Originally delivered on leil Shabbat Parashat Lekh-Lekha 5756 [1995].)

If you have any questions, please write to [office@etzion.org.il](mailto:office@etzion.org.il) TO SUBSCRIBE send e-mail to [majordomo@etzion.org.il](mailto:majordomo@etzion.org.il) with the following message: subscribe YHE-SICHOT Yeshivat Har Etzion's Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash is on the world wide web at <http://www.vbm-torah.org>

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From: RABBI JONATHAN SCHWARTZ [[jschwrtz@ymail.yu.edu](mailto:jschwrtz@ymail.yu.edu)] To: [internetchaburah@yahoo.com](mailto:internetchaburah@yahoo.com) Subject: [internetchaburah] Internet Chaburah -- Parshat Lech Lecha 5764

Prologue: What difference did a few dollars make to him?

Why did he have to turn them down?

In this week's Parsha we read of the battle Avraham waged on behalf of the five kings in order to save his nephew. After the war was declared over, Avraham was offered all the spoils. He swore off everything. An action that begs many questions: First of all, Avraham had received these spoils through Kibbush Milchama (spoils of war). They were rightfully his. Why did he turn them down? Also, why did he feel the need to forcibly turn them down with a Shevuah? After all, if he didn't want the spoils, he could have simply said no. Why the show of defiance?

Maran Rosh HaYeshiva Harav Goldvicht ztl. (Asufas Maarachas Berashis) cited the Talmud (Chullin 89a) which notes that Avraham feared taken anything that was stolen. However, the Rosh Yeshiva asked, Avraham had legitimately acquired these spoils. For him, they were not Gezel (stolen property). Why did he turn them down?

Rav Goldvicht ztl. explained that perhaps no sin would be attached to Avraham had he taken of the spoils but the spoils themselves were tainted through their identity as stolen goods. The people of Sodom had created such a strong environment of thievery, it had penetrated their entire culture, including the inanimate spoils of war. Avraham feared that if he were to bring this culture into his home, he might allow Sodomite influence of his psyche to overpower him as well. Therefore, not only did he disallow it in his home, he declared his opposition to the spoils, and the lifestyle they were remnants of, to be spoiled. Instead, Avraham sought to enrich his life elsewhere.

The "Gift" of Life ??

Shlomo HaMelech made it pretty clear: Those who hate gifts (Sonai Matanot) will live (Mishlei 15:27). The Talmud (Sotah 47b) notes that indeed when gifts became more prevalent, lifespans shortened. Elsewhere (Kiddushin 59a; Chullin 42b; Megillah 28a) the Talmud offers similar insights.

Why is this the case? The Rambam (end of Hil. Zechiya) explains that one should not accept handouts from man but rather accept his assistance from Hashem. This explanation appears in Shulchan Aruch as well (Choshem Mishpat, 249). The Sma offers a different explanation. He suggests that gifts come to people who seek them. Those who seek gifts are likely to overlook flaws in the people who give them and will never work to become better people.

How far must one carry this concept? Rashi (Commentary to Avot 1:10) explains that one should love work in order to stay off public assistance whereby he will enjoy a longer life based on the Possuk of Sonai Matanot Yichyeh. This has led some to conclude that although it is a Mitzvah to give Tzeddaka, it seems better for one not to take it where not absolutely necessary (See VaYechi Yaakov, 28).

Yet, is that completely correct? Is gift giving to be included in Sonai Matanot Yichyeh? Doesn't the Mogen Avraham discuss giving gifts to a Chosson at his Aufruf and entertain the thought that the gift is so important, one might be allowed to carry it on Shabbos?

The Chida (Shut Chaim Shaal I:44) answers that gift giving to a Chosson might be different. He explains that the statement Sonai Matanot Yichyeh applies when the giver has no benefit from the gift. However, this great benefit to the giver of a wedding gift (See Berachot 6a) and

thus the gift is more of a transaction than a pure gift. Sefer Tirosh V'Yitzhar (27) explains that the same can be said about he who accepts the Tzeddaka, that he too, helps the giver achieve his Mitzva, and his accepting is not to be included in Sonai Matanot.

Chochmas Manoch (Bava Metzia 22a) offers a different solution to our problem. He posits that Sonai Matanot Yichyeh applies only when the giver is coerced into giving that which he did not want to give. If the giver wanted to give the gift on his own, there is no violation of Sonai Matanot after all.

L'Halacha, the Bach (Choshen Mishpat 249; Bava Metzia 12) notes that in the standard case we do not say Sonai Matanot Yichyeh. We assume most people prefer the gift. This is the position that is brought by the Aruch HaShulchan (C.M. 249) as well.

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Crash Course in Jewish History Part 4: ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY

by RABBI KEN SPIRO

History is a guidebook for the future. The early lessons of Jewish history reveal a pattern, so we have to pay extra special attention to anything that happens at this period of time.

When we meet Abraham in the Bible in the Book of Genesis, he is already 75 years old, which is interesting because we'd love to know what Abraham did as a little kid and what sports he played, etc. But G-d doesn't want to fill our brains with extraneous information. He only wants to give us the messages we need to learn, because He's trying to teach us and guide us.

The story of Abraham begins when G-d first speaks to him at age 75. The story of Abraham begins when G-d first speaks to him. This means that Abraham lived his whole life without prophecy, without any kind of outside confirmation that his ideology of monotheism is correct, and this says a lot about Abraham's dedication to truth.

In an entirely polytheistic world, Abraham chose to see the reality of one G-d and to dedicate himself to a mission -- if necessary, at the cost of his own life -- of bringing that reality to human consciousness. He did so not because G-d needs people to die for Him, but because that's reality.

It's one thing if G-d is regularly speaking to you, you'll take any pain to live in that reality, but to just go on the basis of your own conviction takes some doing. And this gives us a little indication of what a great human being Abraham was and what a tremendous idealist he was. He did not mind standing "on the other side" -- and that is the meaning of the word Ivri, "Hebrew."

And this is why I call Abraham "the proto-Jew." From Abraham onward, we see this idealism -- an uncompromising drive to "change the world" -- in the Jewish personality.

Abraham passed on this drive to his descendants, who have been at the forefront of virtually every major advance, cause, or social movement in world history. (Jews have not only been awarded a disproportionate number of Nobel prizes for their intellectual contributions, but have led movements such as communism, socialism, feminism, civil rights, labor unions, etc.) Notes non-Jewish historian Ernest Van den Haag:

Asked to make a list of the men who have most dominated the thinking of the modern world, many educated people would name Freud, Einstein, Marx and Darwin. Of these four, only Darwin was not Jewish. In a world where Jews are only a tiny percentage of the population, what is the secret of the disproportionate importance the Jews have had in the history of Western culture? (Ernest Van den Haag, Ernest, The Jewish Mystique.)

The answer to Van den Haag's question is understanding the personality of Abraham.

THREE PATTERNS

So now let's take a look at how Abraham is introduced in the Bible -- not for purposes of Bible study but to identify the sweeping patterns we encounter here, of which we can identify three.

Number one:

G-d said to Abram, "Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. (Genesis 12:1)

We see here that G-d is not like Charles Dickens. Dickens got paid by the word, and he would be as verbose as possible. G-d is the exact opposite. So the question we have to ask is: Why does G-d, who uses words so sparingly throughout the whole Bible, repeat this command so emphatically? "Separate yourself completely, not just from your land, but from your birthplace, from your father's house."

If you grew up in a specific house for a specific period of time, that will always be home for you. When you think of home, no matter where you've lived after that and how comfortable you've been, you'll always think about it as home. There's a very deep connection. So G-d is saying to Abraham: "Separate yourself on the most basic emotional level."

G-d tells Abraham and the Jewish people: Separate yourself completely and go in a different direction.

More importantly, from the macrocosmic, historical perspective, G-d is saying to Abraham, and therefore the Jewish people: "Separate yourself completely and go in a different direction."

The journey that G-d is directing Abraham to undertake is not just a physical journey, it's a journey through history that is going to be different from anyone else's. Abraham is going to become a father to a nation that is not reckoned among the rest of the nations, a nation that dwells alone.

This is the first unique characteristic of Jewish history.

Number two we learn in the next verse:

"I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you and make your name great; and you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2)

This verse conveys G-d's promise that He will be actively involved in Jewish history: "I will make you ..."

In the 17th century when Blaise Pascal, the great French enlightenment philosopher, was asked by Louis XIV for proof of the supernatural, he answered, "The Jewish people, your Majesty." Why? Because he knew Jewish history and he realized that for the Jewish people to survive to the 17th century, violated all the laws of history. Can you imagine what he'd say seeing the Jews made it to the 20th century?! Jewish history is a supernatural phenomenon.

Jewish people should have never come into existence. With Abraham's wife Sarah being barren, that should have been it. Abraham would have died, and his mission would have died with him. But it didn't. A miracle happened.

The Jewish people are a nation with a unique mission, a nation with a unique history. Thus we learn that the Jewish people come into being miraculously and survive all of human history miraculously, outliving some of the greatest empires that ever were.

This is so because the Jews are a nation with a unique mission, a nation with a unique history. Things happen to the Jews that don't happen to other peoples.

To live for 2000 years as a nation without a national homeland is not normal. It's unique in human history. To re-establish a homeland in the place that was yours 2000 years ago is not normal. It's unique in human history.

And number three:

"I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you, and through you, will be blessed all the families of the earth." (Genesis 12:3)

G-d is saying here to Abraham that he and his descendants -- the Jews -- will be under G-d's protection. The nations and peoples who are good to the Jews will do well. Empires and peoples that are bad to the Jews will do poorly. And the whole world is going to be changed by the Jewish people.

You can chart the rise and fall of virtually all the civilizations in the world by how they treated the Jews. That is one of the great patterns of history. You can literally chart the rise and fall of virtually all the civilizations in the western world by how they treated the Jews. A part of it is supernatural for sure, whether it's Spain or Germany or Poland or America or Turkey. We will see this as we go through the timeline.

Part of it, by the way, is not so supernatural, because if you have a group of people living within your country -- an educated, driven, dedicated, loyal, creative, well-connected people -- and you're nice to them and you allow them to participate and contribute in a meaningful way, your country is going to benefit. If you crush those people and expel them, you're going to suffer, because of the economic fallout. But, of course, there's much more going on than just that.

So we have a third pattern -- that the rise and fall of nations and empires is going to be based on how they treat the Jews, which is an amazing idea, and one you can clearly demonstrate in human history.

You can see the incredibly positive impact the Jews have had on the world. The most basic of all is that the Jews have contributed the values that are now linked with democracy -- the values that come from the Torah -- respect for life, justice, equality, peace, love, education, social responsibility etc.

So from these three verses in Genesis we see the key underlying patterns of Jewish history.

Abraham's journey is the paradigm. His personal life and the life of his immediate descendants is going to be a mini-version, a microcosm, of what Jewish history is all about.

NEXT: THE PROMISED LAND

This overview of Jewish history is also available on audio cassette by Rabbi Spiro. It is entitled "A-Z Jewish History in 24 Hours". For more information visit the Aish HaTorah Audio Store.

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From: Kol Torah [koltorah@koltorah.org] Sent: October 24, 2003

CHALAV YISRAEL – Part I

Rav Soloveitchik's View

by RABBI CHAIM JACHTER

Introduction

This week we will explore Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's position regarding the contemporary applicability of the Rabbinic prohibition to consume milk that was milked by a non-Jew and not supervised by a Jew. Indeed a question that is often debated in the Orthodox community is whether or not one may drink packaged milk that is not under Rabbinic supervision. We will present the view of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik as heard from one of his leading students, Rav Menachem Genack. It is vitally important to note that we will address the issue in accordance with the facts that pertain in this country. In many countries, however, it is forbidden to consume unsupervised milk according to all authorities. I have heard that these countries include Spain, Portugal, Poland, and other Eastern Europe countries where milk from non-Kosher animals is commonly available. This information is liable to change and a Rav should be consulted. Rav Soloveitchik's Three Considerations For Leniency

It is well known among Rav Soloveitchik's students that the Rav when he resided in the United States drank packaged milk that did not have any special Rabbinic supervision. Rav Genack mentioned in a Shiur at Yeshiva University that the Rav told him that there exist three considerations to be lenient. First, if no non-Kosher animals are found in the herd of animals that is being milked ("Ein Bedro Tamei") some authorities rule leniently. Second, we may rely on the government (USDA) supervision and inspections to insure that the milk we consume is from cows. Finally, the rabbinic edict forbidden drinking milk from an animal that was milked by a non-Jew technically does not apply today since the cows are milked by machines. It is interesting to note that a great Israeli authority, Rav Zvi Pesach Frank, permitted drinking powdered milk imported from the United States based on somewhat similar considerations (Teshuvot Har Zvi, Yoreh Deah 103-104).

Ein Biedro Tamei

Let us explore these issues through the Gemara, Rishonim, and Acharonim. The Mishnah (Avodah Zarah 35b) records that Chazal forbade consuming milk from a Kosher animal that was milked by a non-Jew without (observant) Jewish supervision. The Gemara explains that this was enacted because of concerns that the non-Jew may have mixed non-Kosher milk with the Kosher milk. Rishonim and Acharonim, however, debate if this prohibition applies even if the non-Jew has no non-Kosher animals in his herd (see Mordechai Avodah Zara 826, Teshuvot Radbaz 4:1147, and S'mak 123). Some authorities are lenient only if, in an entire locale, non-Kosher animals are not milked. The later Acharonim are divided regarding how to resolve this issue. Pri Chadash (Y.D. 115:6) and Chazon Ish (Y.D. 41:4) rule leniently, whereas Aruch Hashulchan (Y.D. 115:5), Chochmat Adam (67:1), and Chatam Sofer (Y.D. 107, cited in the Pitchei Teshuva Y.D. 115:3), rule strictly. The latter three authorities note that the custom among Eastern and Central European Jews was to rule strictly regarding this question. The Darkei Teshuva (115:6) quotes that the custom in Eretz Yisrael was also to be strict about this matter. The Pri Chadash, though, records that the custom in Amsterdam was to be lenient. For further sources on this hotly debated issue, see Sdei Chemed (8:45) and Darkei Teshuva (115:6) who cites that the custom in a number of communities was to adopt the lenient approach to this issue. We should note that the Darkei Teshuva cites the Beit Meir who argues that there is hardly any locale that has no non-Kosher animals in the area and thus this line of leniency is hardly ever relevant. On the other hand, the Pri Chadash and his supporters believe that Ein Biedro Tamei means that there are no non-Kosher animals that are milked in the area. An animal in the zoo does not appear to impinge on the applicability of this rule according to the Pri Chadash.

It is important to note that even if the strict ruling is adopted, the lenient opinions can be used as a legitimate Snif Lihakel (an adjunct consideration) to a lenient ruling. An example of this approach can be found in Rav David Zvi Hoffman's responsum (Teshuvot Melamed Lihail 2:33) where he utilized the lenient opinion as a consideration to permit a sick individual, for health reasons, to drink buttermilk that has not been rabbinically supervised. Rav Soloveitchik seems to be similarly utilizing these lenient opinions as a consideration to rule leniently, in light of the rule that milk from non-Kosher animals is not commercially available. (An owner of a milk factory once told me that it would be economically counterproductive to introduce non-Kosher milk into the milk that is to be marketed.) It is vitally

important to note, though, that this is not true in Israel. Rav Zev Whitman the Rav of Tenuva, one of the world's great experts regarding Kashrut of milk and milk products, reports (Techumin 22:459) that camel milk is (regrettably) commercially available in Israel and is used as an ingredient in ice cream that is sold in Southern portions of Eretz Yisrael. This is one of the reasons that the Israeli Chief Rabbinate is not lenient regarding milk that is not supervised by an observant Jew (see Rav Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron's essay in Techumin volume 23).

On the other hand, Rav Whitman (Binetiv Hechalav p.40) notes that since the price of non-Kosher milk is tens of times more expensive than Kosher milk we need not be concerned that non-Kosher milk was introduced into the Kosher milk. Thus, he argues using the leniency advanced by the Pri Chadash that the prohibition of non-Kosher milk does not apply when the price of non-Kosher milk is far more expensive than Kosher milk. The basis for this approach is the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 34b) that teaches that although the Mishna (Avodah Zarah 29b) prohibits Muryis (oil from pickled fish that sometimes contains wine) due to concern that non-Kosher wine was added, the prohibition does not apply when wine is far more expensive than pure Muryis.

#### Government Inspection

The second consideration is to rely on the government's inspection of milk to ensure that no non-Kosher milk has been introduced. This ruling (see Chazon Ish Y.D. 41:4) is based in the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 39b), which states that the observant Jewish supervisor need not constantly watch the milking. Rather, as long as he has easy access to view the milking, the milk is acceptable. This is because the non-Jew milking the cow is afraid ("Mirtat") to introduce non-Kosher milk, lest the Jew see him. It seems clear that as long as the non-Jew is afraid to put non-Kosher milk into the Kosher milk, one is permitted to consume the milk. Indeed, many of the great twentieth-century authorities believe that the Halacha essentially regards responsible government supervision as Halachically equivalent to Jewish supervision in the context of the halacha of Chalav Yisrael because it creates a Mirtat to introduce non-Kosher milk. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrat Moshe Y.D. 1:46) writes, "In a case where there is fear ("Mirtat") of government penalty, this rabbinic prohibition does not apply." Other authorities who essentially accept this position include the Chazon Ish (Y. D. 41:4, though see our discussion that will appear in Yirtzeh Hashem and Bli Neder next week), Rav Zvi Pesach Frank in case of powdered milk (ad. loc.), Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (Teshuvot Ivra 38) and Rav Yaakov Kaminetzsky (Emet LiYaakov p.308).

It is important to note that according to this approach, it is only permitted to consume milk poured from a container from a USDA supervised company (or any other country that strictly supervises milk production). However, it would not be permitted to drink milk that a non-Jew pours from his own container (see the story related by the Aruch Hashulchan Y.D. 115:6). Incidentally, Rav Moshe Feinstein rules (Teshuvot Igrat Moshe Y.D. 1:46) that this Rabbinic edict does not apply to a non-observant Jew. Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv and Rav Shmuel Wosner (presented in Binitivot Hechalav, a recent publication by Tenuva which outlines many of the Kashrut issues involved with contemporary production of milk and milk products) agree with this ruling. Others, however, disagree (see Encyclopedia Talmudit 15:174).

#### Davar Shebiminyan

Despite this leniency, it is well known that Rav Moshe Feinstein encouraged (both in writing and orally) people to drink milk that has been supervised by rabbis. The primary reason for this is based on a Gemara (Beitzah 5a) that "Davar Shebiminyan Tzarich Minyan Acheir L'haitiro," which means, essentially, that a rabbinic edict applies even if its reason no longer applies. This point was strongly emphasized by the Chatam Sofer in his aforementioned responsum regarding Chalav Yisrael. Although the Pri Chadash argues that milk was not a Davar Shebiminyan, namely that there was no formal prohibition in situations where there is no concern for a mixture of non-Kosher milk, the custom in most of Europe was not to follow the Pri Chadash.

However, Rav Soloveitchik's third reason to rule leniently might overcome this obstacle. He argues that the edict applies only if a non-Jew milks the animal but not if a machine milks the cow. According to this approach, the Rabbinic edict does not apply to the milk we currently drink even if one assumes that milk was prohibited by Chazal as a Davar Shebiminyan. One might ask then why should wine produced by non-Jews be a problem today if the wine is produced entirely by machinery and there is no hand contact with the wine. An answer is that the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 125:2) states explicitly that wine produced by non-Jews is prohibited even if the non-Jew produced the wine indirectly and did not touch the wine. By contrast, the Shulchan Aruch does not make such an assertion in the context of the Halachot of milk production.

On the other hand, none of the other twentieth-century Poskim make Rav Soloveitchik's argument. Perhaps they believe that the rule articulated by the

Shulchan Aruch in the context of wine applies to milk as well. This would be especially true according to the assertion of the Chatam Sofer that milk is a Davar Shebiminyan similar to wine. A proof to this might be derived from the accepted practice among all Orthodox Jews is that the rabbinic prohibition of cheese produced by a non-Jew still applies today even though the cheese today is produced by machine.

It should be noted, though, that a concern of those who rule strictly is that if Chalav Yisrael is not observed then this law will be forgotten by Am Yisrael (see Rav Yaakov Breisch, Teshuvot Chelkat Yaakov 3:37). The concern is that we will forget to observe this Halacha when its reason is applicable, such as in countries or circumstances where the lenient considerations are not relevant. Accordingly, even those Jews who adopt the lenient position are reminded by those Jews who accept the strict position, that sometimes milk can be considered not kosher.

In addition, it is important to note Rav Zev Whitman's insight (Techumin 22:460-463) that today a significant number of cows throughout the world undergo a surgical procedure that renders them (and the milk they produce) as Treifah. Thus rabbinic monitoring of the situation is necessary to ascertain that this does not render the milk Treifah. The Orthodox Union (see Mesorah Volume 10) has determined that this is not currently a problem in the United States. One may not assume that this is not a problem in other parts of the world without consulting a competent Rav.

It also should be noted that one who is lenient should serve only Rabbinically supervised milk to those who adopt the strict opinion (see Rama Y.D. 119:7). On the other hand, those who adopt the strict approach should not regard those who rule leniently as not being observant of Kashrut laws, since they are following eminent halachic authorities such as Rav Soloveitchik and Rav Feinstein (see aforementioned Rama).

#### Conclusion

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrat Moshe Y.D. 1:47) writes that, "Most observant Jews and also many Rabbanim are lenient regarding this matter and G-d forbid that one declare that they are acting improperly." Indeed, many of Rav Soloveitchik's students follow their Rebbe's example and adopt the lenient approach to this than issue. We should note, though, that today a much greater percentage of the observant community adopts the strict approach to this issue than when Rav Moshe wrote his Teshuva in 1954. We should note that the lenient position appears to be especially cogent because there is no concern for a violation of a Torah prohibition in this matter. The Shach (Y.D. 118:8) points out that we are not concerned that the non-Jew added a large amount of non-Kosher milk because then the adulteration would be obvious as non-Kosher milk looks different than Kosher milk as noted by the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 35b). Accordingly, since the concern is only that a small amount of non-Kosher milk was added, there is no possibility of violating a Biblical prohibition exists since two like items (Min Bimino, in this case the non-Kosher milk and the Kosher milk) are nullified on a Biblical level as long as there is a majority of the Kosher product. See, though, Pitchei Teshuva (Y.D. 118:1) who questions the reasoning of this Shach based on the fact that the Kosher and non-Kosher milk are of different tastes and therefore should be considered a case of two different items (Min B'sh'eino Mino) where there must be more than sixty times of the Kosher item to nullify the non-Kosher item. See, though, the Chazon Ish (Y.D. 41:1) who explains that there is no prohibition on a biblical level to drink unsupervised milk since the chance of mixture of non-Kosher milk is so small.

Next week we will, Im Yirtzeh Hashem and Bli Neder, explore this question further and present the reasons behind those who follow the strict opinion regarding this issue.

From: Kol Torah [koltorah@koltorah.org] Sent: Friday, October 31, 2003 9:15 AM  
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Rabbi Adler and the Torah Academy Faculty wish their sincerest congratulations to their fellow faculty member, Mr. Bryan Kinzbrunner on his recent engagement to Shira Frankel. This week's issue has been sponsored by Rabbi and Mrs. Darren Blackstein in observance of the Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Blackstein's beloved parents Reuven ben Yisrael & Miriam Chaya bat Simcha. This week's issue is also sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Michael Richmond in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of their son Yitzchak this week.

#### CHALAV YISRAEL PART II: The Strict View

by RABBI CHAIM JACHTER

#### Introduction

Last week we presented the lenient view among Poskim regarding Chalav Yisrael. We noted that many great Poskim support the lenient view and that there is a strong

basis in the Gemara, Rishonim, and Acharonim for those who follow the lenient view. This week, however, we will outline the view of those who follow the strict approach to this issue. They also enjoy the support of many great Poskim and their logic can be supported by the Gemara, Rishonim, and Acharonim. We will outline their view and three related issues - the status of powdered milk, cheese, and milk proteins that are produced from milk produced by a non-Jew that was not supervised by an observant Jew.

#### Government Supervision - Rav Moshe Feinstein

Last week we noted a classic dispute whether the rabbinic prohibition to consume milk that was not supervised at the time of milking by an observant Jew applies when there are no non-Kosher animals in the area that are milked for commercial purposes. The Pri Chadash is most prominently associated with the lenient view and the Chatam Sofer is most prominently associated with the strict opinion. The core of this dispute is whether this rabbinic prohibition applies even when the reason for the rabbinic enactment does not apply. In other words, the question is whether the prohibition of Chalav Akum is categorized as a Davar Sh'b'minyan, as we explained last week.

We noted last week that the Chochmat Adam, the Aruch Hashulchan, and Teshuvot Melamed Lihovil record that the custom in most of Europe was to follow the strict view of the Chatam Sofer regarding Chalav Yisrael. In the United States, however, the practice of most observant Jews in America during the early part of the twentieth century was to follow the lenient opinion. There were some people, though, even in early twentieth century America who followed the strict approach of the Chatam Sofer who insists that an observant Jew must see the milking process even if we are certain that the farmer is not introducing non-Kosher milk. My grandfather, Reb Chaim Adler of Brooklyn, made sure that the milk he sold in his grocery store was Chalav Yisrael, as he hired a Mashgiach to supervise the milking of the cows in the dairy in Queens that supplied his milk. My grandfather's practice, though, constituted the exception rather than the rule at that time in the United States.

Rav Melech Schachter (father of Rav Hershel Schachter, who arrived in this country as a very young man in the early 1930s) told me that those who were lenient regarding milk assumed that they were following the lenient approach of the Pri Chadash. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 1:47), however, argues that in America where there is government supervision of the milking process to ensure that only cow's milk is being sold, even the Chatam Sofer would permit consuming the milk even without rabbinic supervision. Rav Moshe argues that this is because the Halacha, in the context of the laws of testimony, equates knowledge of an event with seeing an event, (see Shavuot 34a). Thus, he argues that our knowledge that the government monitors the milk in this country is the equivalent of our watching the milking process.

This argument is supported by the fact that the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 39b) does not require a Jew to actually observe every step of the milking process. Rather, the Gemara states that it is sufficient if a Jew is nearby and has easy access to view the milking, since then the non-Jew fears introducing non-Kosher milk because the Jew may at any time unexpectedly watch the milking. Rav Moshe argues that even non-Jewish government supervision creates a similar situation and thus the milk is permissible even according to the Chatam Sofer.

#### A Critique of Rav Moshe's Leniency

Rav Moshe's argument, however, is somewhat debatable. The point of the Chatam Sofer appears to be that even though we are certain that there is no non-Kosher milk introduced to the milk, a Jew still must supervise the milking process. The Chatam Sofer rejects the Pri Chadash's argument that the facts of greater expense of non-Kosher milk and the absence of non-Kosher animals being milked in the area create a certainty that there is no non-Kosher milk introduced and thus obviate the need for a Jew to supervise the milking process. Thus, the Chatam Sofer seems to reject the argument that knowledge equals vision in the context of this Halacha. Even in the aforementioned Gemara the observant Jew is involved with the milking process, as he is seated outside the barn. In the case of government supervision an observant Jew is not at all involved in supervising the milking process.

On the other hand, in the Pri Chadash's situation there was no external supervision of the milking process and no fear (Mirtat) on the part of the non-Jews milking the cows. Rather, the Pri Chadash was relying only on the reasoning that it is extremely unlikely that the non-Jews were introducing non-Kosher milk into their product. Thus, in the situation of government supervision it is debatable whether it should be equated with the case in the aforementioned Gemara or the situation of the Pri Chadash. Parenthetically, we should note that those who adopt the strict approach to the Chalav Yisrael issue discuss whether supervision by video cameras and computer suffices even according to the Chatam Sofer. Rav Zev Whitman (Techumin 22:466-468) and Rav Mordechai Gross (B'n'tiv Hechalav pp. 54-56) discuss this issue. In both these situations, though, a Jew is involved in the

supervision process and it seems to be more analogous to the situation described in the aforementioned Gemara than the situation of non-Jewish government supervision. Rav Whitman reports that Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv and Rav Shmuel Vosner, two of today's leading Poskim, ruled (in a ruling issued to the Mehadrin division of the rabbinical supervisors of the giant Israeli dairy company Tenuva) that supervision of the milking process by video cameras suffices to satisfy the opinion of the Chatam Sofer and to categorize the milk as "Chalav Yisrael".

Indeed, the Chazon Ish (Y.D. 41:4) aligns the idea of relying on the government supervision with the reasoning of the Pri Chadash. According to the Chazon Ish, the Chatam Sofer rejects relying on government supervision in this context. We must clarify, though, that the Chazon Ish in his writings is quite inclined to the view of the Pri Chadash, although he does not rule explicitly in accordance with the Pri Chadash. The Chazon Ish's view on this matter is clarified by his brother-in-law Rav Yaakov Kanievsky (Krayna D'igrata 2:123) that the Chazon Ish relied on the Pri Chadash to permit frail Yeshiva students drink powdered milk in difficult wartime years when milk was not readily available in Eretz Yisrael. Thus, the Chazon Ish essentially accepts the view of the Pri Chadash but only in case of great need. For further discussion of the Chazon Ish's view on this issue see B'n'tivei Hechalav p.31.

Many other Acharonim adopt the approach that government supervision is inadequate to satisfy the view of the Chatam Sofer. These opinions include Rav Yaakov Breisch (Teshuvot Chelkat Yaakov 3:37-38), Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Weisz (Teshuvot Minchat Yitzchak 9:81), and Rav Shmuel Vosner (Teshuvot Sheivet Halevi 4:87). See Rav Vosner's responsum where he records a remarkable conversation he had with the Chazon Ish about this matter.

We should note that even Rav Zvi Pesach Frank who permits powdered milk produced from non-Chalav Yisrael milk, does not permit the consumption of the actual milk even though we are certain that no non-Kosher milk has been introduced because of government supervision. Thus, Rav Zvi Pesach should be included in the list of Rabbanim who do not subscribe to Rav Moshe's lenient ruling.

Moreover, Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yechave Da'at 4:42) rules in accordance with the strict view despite the fact that the two primary advocates of the lenient view, the Radvaz and the Pri Chadash, are among the most authoritative Sephardic Halachic authorities and despite the fact that the Chatam Sofer is most insistent regarding Ashkenazim that they have a tradition to reject the lenient rulings of the Radvaz and Pri Chadash. Rav Ovadia explains that his ruling is based on the fact that the Chida (Shiyurei Bracha 115; the Chida is also among the most prominent of Sephardic Halachic authorities) who records that the custom in Eretz Yisrael and its environs is to follow the strict opinion. Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, another major contemporary Halachic authority, writes (Kol Tzofayich 145) that even those who observe only the standard level of Kashrut (and not Mehadrin) should scrupulously avoid relying on the lenient opinion on this matter.

Indeed, it is well known that even Rav Moshe Feinstein writes in his many responsa on this topic that a Ba'al Nefesh (someone on a high spiritual level) should follow the strict opinion on this issue. It seems that Rav Moshe was aware that his argument was somewhat debatable. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, though, felt the lenient approach is sufficiently convincing that even he relied on the lenient view for reasons that we discussed at length in last week's issue of Kol Torah.

We should note that Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky (Emet L'Yaakov p.308) rules that those who follow the strict opinion regarding Chalav Yisrael are permitted to eat from the dishes and utensils of those who follow the lenient view. He cites as a precedent the ruling of the Rama (Y.D. 64:9) regarding a certain fat regarding which there was a Halachic dispute about its Kashrut and some communities adopted the lenient view and others followed the stricter view. The Rama rules that those who adopt the strict view are permitted to eat from the dishes and utensils of those who adopt the lenient view. The Rama (Y.D. 115:1) rules similarly regarding the dispute (that we will, Im Yirtzeh Hashem and Bli Neder, discuss next week) about butter produced by a non-Jew, regarding which there are different practices among different communities. (For an explanation of these rulings of the Rama, see "Gray Matter" p.247). Rav Yaakov also rules that one who adopts the strict view is permitted to give non-Chalav Yisrael products to those who are lenient about this issue, and he does not violate thereby the prohibition to cause others to sin (Lifnei Iveir Lo Ti'tein Michshol). (For an explanation of this ruling see "Gray Matter" p.171.)

Next week we shall complete our discussion of the strict view regarding Chalav Yisrael. We will present the policy of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate regarding this issue and the debate regarding cheese, powdered milk, and whey derived from non-Chalav Yisrael milk.